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Extension Service
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REPORT OF CONFERENCE AT VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION*

February 11, 1946

By Ola Powell Malcolm

Although I have already verbally reported to you the conference which Director Wilson's office advised me to attend in the Veterans' Bureau on February 11 at the request of Mrs. Carter Collins, I believe Director Wilson and Mr. Brigham might also be interested in knowing some of the details - hence this this memorandum.

Again permit me to say I was indeed very appreciative of the special opportunity afforded me to attend this meeting which was arranged for Mrs. Collins by General Omar Bradley. The conference was presided over by Mrs. Collins and General Kerr, who is chief of the newly organized Special Services Office in the Veterans Bureau.

The purpose of the conference was to discuss a proposed special service program for the establishment of Women's Voluntary Training Divisions in State Department's and Veteran's Affairs. The setup in Georgia and California provided organization examples which were discussed. My December field trip report gives description of the organization in Georgia. Mrs. Carter Collins is chairman of the Distaff on Governor Ellis Arnall's staff in the Georgia State Veterans Service Bureau. She is also president of the National Association of Army and Navy Wives, Editor of the Association's magazine and author of several books published during the war. Mrs. Collins was the motivating spirit in the organization of Army and Navy Wives in their wartime activities among mothers and wives of our soldiers.

Before outlining plans for a conference in Washington, D. C., Mrs. Collins brought together a group of nationally known representatives of a large number of Government agencies and organizations, educators, philanthropists, representatives of the press, returned veterans of the Second World War and others to aid in developing her first Distaff program and the first discussion outlines that were used in orientation courses where women leaders were trained for work in community veterans centers.

The first part of the conference in the Veterans Bureau on February 11 centered around facts pertaining to the existing need for the establishment of larger numbers of community veteran centers where methods of dissemination of information to the families of men of the Armed forces and veterans can be simplified as immediately as possible. Examples and requests from a number of States for assistance were cited.

* From a memorandum of February 18, 1946, addressed to H. W. Hochbaum, Chief, Division of Field Coordination.

Through assistance and collaboration with State universities, A. & M. Colleges and other proper schools, plans will be made to hold short courses in group leadership and currently related subjects for women wishing to participate and to qualify as leaders of this effort for their local organizations and communities. Throughout the Conference emphasis was placed on the need and the importance of making available as soon as possible a family counseling service in every district where wives and mothers may receive information and advice on family problems and readjustments. These family counsellors are to serve on voluntary basis and will furnish in condensed form, information relating to the type of services which organizations and agencies are ready to offer in various localities for the benefit and welfare of the wives and families of the men of our Army and Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marines, and veterans.

Mention was made several times of the fact that such a program would aid all departments of the Government concerned, presenting their programs to student veterans and their wives at schools, A. & M. Colleges, universities, and to community leaders who enroll for the leadership training courses at their colleges.

Soldiers' families in each discussion group could aid in a most effective manner, in every community, with United Nations Organization programs of study for peace and their assistance in community health programs and others would be helpful.

One suggestion I made earlier to the planning committee follows along with this idea, i.e. "The veteran family's contribution in community program building may be lost sight of in the many efforts that are being made to help them, first to get a house to live in and to help them make peace-time adjustments in the business of homemaking. Many thousands of our returned soldiers and war workers have developed new skills and have newer knowledge about many things needed in the actual work of community building. Unless all these skills are utilized to the best advantage, no community can develop, as it should, and the civilians will be less satisfied with the opportunities such places offer for their families."

Throughout the plans and organization proposed in this February 11 Conference discussion, the intent and purpose was to promote the development and extension of adequate voluntary services at community veterans centers. This program in the States where it is adopted has a Woman's Voluntary Training Division of the State Veterans Department or Commission. If this organization pattern is followed in the other States, the Director of the Woman's Division will be aided by an advisory committee (composed of the State heads of the various women's organizations) in the organization of district women's voluntary committee of representatives of the same woman's organization. Each district will select its own chairman. The same process will be repeated in organizing committees and selecting leaders at the community levels.

Women's Services in the establishment and operation of community veterans centers is as urgent and as patriotic in peace time as the services women rendered in the successful operation of USO centers during the war. At the separation centers veterans are given complete information concerning soldier and civilian transition. The Distaff family counselors could render a like service for the wives and mothers of these men and so fill a gap in our national planning. The home demonstration agents have much to contribute to the Distaff if and when organized in the various States.

Everyone was agreed in this and other committee meetings I attended that in America today no service is more urgently needed than one which can promote effective widespread use of information (for wives and mothers of returning servicemen and others) relative to the stabilization of the American home and family and the formation of community discussion groups in women's organizations for this purpose. The plan proposed provides for the inclusion of women's groups.-- voluntary, fraternal, religious, and social in an immediate five year and overall ten year plan to reach the objectives in which wives and mothers of our former and present soldiers and sailors can have direct responsibility.

This plan has been developing and gaining momentum since before VJ-day. I understand from reports of the Association of Army and Navy Wives and from information discussed at previous conferences, as a member of Mrs. Collins' committee, that early in the spring of 1945 at the invitation of President and Mrs. Roosevelt plans for the future of the Association were presented with the pledged assistance of the White House. The death of President Roosevelt deferred this assistance. President Truman has planned a National Conference of leaders to consider this effort. The White House Conference, which was scheduled for February 11 had to be postponed owing to the national labor situation and other problems besetting the President at that time.

The President of the Woman's Foundation requested Mrs. Carter Collins to present these plans including Distaff plans in Georgia to the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. She went directly to New York from the Veterans Bureau Conference.

Before completing this report of the Conference held in the Veterans Bureau on February 11 under the auspices of General Kerr's Special Service Division, I should include information as to the personnel in attendance. There were some people whose names and titles I did not get and it is possible I also missed making note of one or two Government agencies and organizations with representatives in attendance. I know of a few who were invited but I failed to see them if they were there:

Mrs. Eugene Meyer represented the press and is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Woman's Foundation

Dr. Charters also represented the Woman's Foundation

Mr. George Reynolds, Assistant to Mr. Wallace, Department of Commerce

Mr. Alva M. Meyer, Chief, Division of Veterans Council, Department of Commerce (I understand Mr. Henry Wallace is very interested in the Distaff plan).

Dr. Lenroot and Dr. Elliot, Children's Bureau, Department of Labor

Chester Williams, Division Public Liaison, State Department

Dr. Carson and Mr. Manuel, Office of Price Administration

Miss Wood, General Federation of Women's Clubs

Mrs. George P. Taubman, Jr., Western States Director, Association Army and Navy Wives

Col. Wilson, Coordinating and Planning Division, Veterans Bureau

Col. Mary Agnes Brown, WAC, Division, Veterans Bureau.

It was the consensus of opinion of this group that the Distaff program, proposing establishment of Women's Voluntary Training Divisions in State Departments of the Veterans Bureau and Commissions, would afford a splendid way of getting over opportunities the various Federal agencies can give to veterans and their families. Such work in a few States is filling a very important niche in the homes and lives of former service men and women and their families.

Throughout the discussion I felt that our county home demonstration agents and members of our county home demonstration councils, in many States, may need orientation in many of the subjects about which wives and mothers of our soldiers and sailors are asking for help. In matters that concern legal rights, duties, privileges of the veterans' dependents - I doubt if county home demonstration agents are well enough informed as to the type of help and its sources for immediate contact. However, I am quite certain that the home demonstration agents have much to contribute that will be helpful to the Distaff and to the families of the veterans.

New materials prepared for use of the Distaff in each community veterans service center contains timely instructions for the veteran's family. For example, a set of instructions set up by the Woman's Foundation - "A Journey Through Chaos" - deals with the terrific need for such instruction.

In a few States where requests are most urgent for organizing the work of the Distaff, plans will be gotten under way as soon as possible. A Nation-wide program will not be announced to all Governors until after further perfection of the plan and the securing of necessary approval on the memoranda dealing with finances.

I wish that somehow it might be made possible to dedicate the week of May 5, National Home Demonstration Week, to "The American Home." Stabilization of the American Home and Family is truly Extension's first high aim in work for peace. Much fine publicity could evolve for home demonstration work from the use of some such theme for National Home Demonstration Week and this too might aid us in our later position relating to work of the Distaff in the various States. I am also confident that the leading farm women who requested our co-operation in promoting this nation-wide program will sanction special effort being made to recognize rural women's contributions in reaching and helping effectively wives and families of veterans who are establishing new homes and those who are new civilians in their communities. We may appear, to some, to be a little smug and a little pat in our pattern, but I know the Extension Service program is designed to cover extension education for all families. I do, however, believe that through home demonstration clubs and home demonstration councils we should encourage that more be done to inform wives and mothers of veterans as to how they can make the best contribution toward the "New Horizons" their men fought for.

Since the soldiers will set the standards of life in the Nation they have saved and since they will, for some time to come, be the heroes of youth and set standards for the next generation, any special work we can do to reach and to help them and their families effectively will further our educational programs as much as almost any special effort that can be made at this time.

Extension must reach and help larger numbers of young veterans' families if home demonstration agents are to contribute their best to preserve the American home. It is Extension's sincere conviction that the traditional American home is worthy of preservation. It is believed that the indifference and neglect of the war years has damaged the fabric of family life and disrupted the American home to a point where aid in its re-establishment is vitally necessary as a part of our services and a part of our debt to the veteran.

